

DEC urges citizens to actively take part in voters' verification

RAWALPINDI: District Election Commissioner (DEC), Rawalpindi Shaheen Ghazal has urged the citizens to cooperate with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and actively take part in the ongoing voters' registration and verification process.

She informed that the DEC had set up a Cell for the voters registration complaints. She said the citizens can lodge complaints if any about the voters' registration on the numbers of the complaint cell including 051-9290177, 051-9290174 and 0333-7734243. Shaheen Ghazal informed that the door-to-door voters' verification campaign was in full swing in the district. Exactly 3,454,461 were total registered voters in Rawalpindi district while all persons who were eligible would be registered under the campaign before 2023 general elections, she added.

She said, the ECP like other parts of the country had started door-to-door voters' verification and authentication campaign across the district.

Shaheen Ghazal informed that the first phase of the verification campaign would continue till 6th of next month while the second phase of

electoral rolls' verification would commence from Jan 26, next year.

She said that the citizens should include their votes, if it is not on the list, or if they want to get their votes transferred. The verified lists would help in the accomplishment of national duty transparently.

The teams would hand over form-13 to a voter if the vote is not registered or its transfer is sought, she said adding that the citizen will have to return the form to the teams after filling it while the government employees will use form-14. The authorities concerned were assigned the task to oversee all stages of the revision of electoral rolls in their respective areas. The preliminary draft of the electoral rolls would be displayed in designated display centers for public review. The public can also register their complaints for corrections in the list, transfer of their votes to a permanent or temporary address written in their Computerized National Identity Cards. The citizens can also add their names to the list and remove the names of the deceased voters.

The ECP has asked the voters to check their registration status on voters' lists by sending SMS with their

Computerized National Identity Card number to its service 8300.

1.5m people benefitting from 'Langar Khanas' in last month

The government has expanded the "Ehsaas Koi Bhooka Na Soy (EKBNS)" program across the country and deployed some 24 food trucks in various cities to facilitate around 1.5 million people during the last month.

Talking to APP, focal person Panagah's Naseem ur Rehman said 'Ehsaas Koye Bhooka Na Soye' (EKBNS) was a new policy initiative of the federal government to eliminate hunger and malnutrition in the country. "The initiative is an extension of Ehsaas Langar Policy and aims to distribute cooked meal at designated delivery points to people in need especially those at risk of or experiencing hunger," Rehman said. Meals, he said were delivered free of charge through food truck arrangements, where many of the EKBNS recipients were hailing from the labor class including elderly, differently-abled, poor workers, daily wage earners, women, and children who lacked access to Ehsaas Langar sites in industrial zones. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Children participate in musical chair game during Kind Fest and Carnival for Orphan Kids at Lok Virsa organised by NGO Act of Kindness.

Solo exhibition 'Beauty Alt Atrocity' attracting people

ISLAMABAD: A solo exhibition titled "Beauty Alt Atrocity" is in full swing amid attracting large number of people at Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) which was started on November 22 and will continue till November 30.

In her works Ayisha Arshad Shahnawaz explores the innumerable sufferings and miseries which are caused in the process of creating something fantastical and worthy, the sacrifice every individual makes to achieve the desired on a very personal level as well as a societal level.

Ayisha Arshad Shahnawaz is a Canadian-Pakistani artist born in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1975. A graduate of the prestigious National College of Art, her work has been exhibited in six countries spanning three continents.

The displayed artworks have been privately built up and are so complex, diverse, and somehow both entirely contemporary and yet faithfully traditional, that it boggles the mind. The exhibition was organized by Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), Visual Arts Division, featuring more than 25 artworks, including abstract art as well as calligraphy.

In her displays, Ayisha has highlighted the bitter experiences of her life in captivating colors, which seem to be very beautiful, but in each piece of art, there was a full-blown story. Ayisha has shown her mesmerizing paintings Nationally and Internationally on numerous platforms. She has presented her works as part of an EU art-exchange program with Canada. Her work was also shown in the 'Vialful' exhibit.

Ayisha Arshad Shahnawaz was one of ten overseas

Canadians selected by the Contemporary Art Galleries Association (Association des Galeries d'art Contemporain) in Montreal to showcase their work during the Millennium Fair in Montreal. She was among a handful of artists from around the globe invited by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs to exhibit their work. PNCA is dedicated to promote Pakistani Art on Local and National scale. Our elevate and unique programs that present the traditional and contemporary art practices we reflect upon the excellence and cultural diversity of Pakistan as well as supports professional development of the artist.

PNCA is committed to promote significant aspects of the country and encourages community participation in gallery activities, fostering curatorial practice to artist's own understanding of their work and encourages a healthy and sustainable local arts industry.

PNCA has maintained a range of regionally focused visual arts exhibitions featuring both nationally and internationally recognized artists.

ANF seizes hashish, arrests one drug peddler
In a combined operation of Anti Narcotics Force Balochistan and ANF Intelligence, 15.6 kg of hashish valued around Rs. 507,000 in the domestic market was recovered.

According to a spokesperson the drugs were concealed inside battery chargers. Cases had been registered and investigation is underway. Meanwhile, in another operation in Punjab, the ANF has seized about 9.6 kg hashish from a man identified Muhammad Tahir. The accused had hidden eight packets of drugs under the seats of the vehicle. The value of the drug recovered from the ac-

Ignite inks agreement with University to launch six NIC

ISLAMABAD: Ignite National Technology Fund has signed an agreement with the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad for its sixth National Incubation Center (NIC) to be launched in Faisalabad by next year.

The agreement was signed by CEO Ignite, Asim Shahryar Husain, and Vice-Chancellor, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Dr. Iqbal Ahmad Khan. The signing ceremony was also attended by Federal Secretary for IT & Telecom, Dr. Muhammad Sohail Rajput, and officials of IT ministry, Ignite and UAF, said a news release.

CEO Ignite said that Faisalabad is the third-largest city of Pakistan and

is the agricultural and textile hub of the country with a contribution of around \$20 billion to Pakistan's economy. So it was natural for Ignite and its board to decide to launch the next incubator in Faisalabad, he added. He said that the focus of the incubator will be on agritech startups that can come up with ICT-based solutions for improving the productivity and efficiency of the country's agriculture and textile sectors. He said that Ignite will launch its 7th incubator in Hyderabad also by next year. Vice-Chancellor, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Dr. Iqbal Ahmad Khan stated that the university has many research labs related to agriculture and textile. Also, many

researchers have researched new ideas and products related to agriculture.

However, they have not been able to commercialize those products because of the lack of a proper incubator with mentoring and networking services for guiding such projects. He said that Ignite's NIC will fill this gap and will help in boosting the productivity of many agriculture-related products in the country. Federal Secretary for IT & Telecom, Dr. Muhammad Sohail Rajput, congratulated Ignite and the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad on signing the agreement and hoped that this partnership will be the beginning of a successful journey for the startups

Australia detects first COVID-19 Omicron infections



SYDNEY: Health officials said they had detected the COVID-19 Omicron strain in Australia for the first time in two passengers who were tested after flying into Sydney from southern Africa.

The eastern state of New South Wales' health authority said it had conducted urgent genomic testing and confirmed the new strain was present in the two people who landed in Sydney on Saturday.

Both passengers came from southern Africa and arrived in Australia on a Qatar Airways flight via Doha, NSW Health said in a statement. They tested positive for COVID-19 shortly after arriving, leading to an urgent analysis for possible infection by the heavily mutated Omicron strain. "The two positive cases, who were asymptomatic, are in isolation in the special health accommodation. Both people are fully vaccinated," NSW Health said. Another 12 passengers from southern Africa on the same flight did not test positive for COVID-19 but had been placed in quarantine, it said. About 260 passengers and crew on the plane have also been told to isolate, the health authority said.

The plane with the infected passengers landed on the same day that Australia announced it was banning flights from nine southern African countries including South Africa and Zimbabwe. The World Health Organization has listed Omicron as a variant of concern and said it could take several weeks to know if there are significant changes in transmissibility, severity or implications for COVID-19 vaccines, tests and treatments. The arrival of the new variant comes just a month after Australia lifted a ban on citizens travelling overseas without permission, with the country's border also set to open to skilled workers and international

students by year's end.

After more than 18 months of closed borders, fully vaccinated Australian citizens no longer have to seek an exemption to leave the country.

On Mar 20 last year Australia introduced some of the world's toughest border restrictions in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

For almost 600 days, countless international flights were grounded, and overseas travel slowed to a trickle.

Quarantine arrangements for returning vaccinated residents depend on where they arrive in Australia.

While Sydney has scrapped quarantine for returning travellers, other Australian states with lower vaccination rates still have mandatory and costly 14-day hotel quarantine requirements.

It is unclear whether the arrival of the new variant will lead to a return to tighter rules.

Speaking a few hours before the confirmation that the Omicron strain had arrived in Australia, New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrotte seemed reluctant to commit to any new restrictions.

"We need to learn to live alongside the virus and also live alongside the various strains of the virus that will come our way," Perrotte said.

"The best thing that we can do is to get vaccinated and get booster shots," he added. "There are limits to what the state and federal government can do."

Compulsory on-arrival ART for travellers entering Singapore from Malaysia via land VTL after reports about new COVID-19 strain

All overseas travellers to Australia's New South Wales, Victoria states must isolate for 3 days amid new COVID-19 variant concerns

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updates on the coronavirus outbreak: <https://cna.asia/telegram>

Two cases of Omicron virus variant detected in Britain

Two linked cases of the new Omicron coronavirus variant have been detected in Britain connected to travel to southern Africa, health minister Sajid Javid said.

Omicron, dubbed a "variant of concern" by the World Health Organization on Friday, is potentially more contagious than previous variants of the disease, although experts do not know yet if it will cause more or less severe COVID-19 compared to other coronavirus strains.

"Late last night I was contacted by the UK Health Security Agency. I was informed that they have detected two cases of this new variant, Omicron, in the United Kingdom," Javid said in a broadcast clip.

Essex County Council later confirmed on Twitter that there was a single case identified in Brentwood in the southeastern region of England. The council said it was linked to a single case from Nottingham in central England involving travel to South Africa.

"We are working with regional and local public health officers who are assessing the situation. All close contacts of these individuals will be followed up and requested to isolate and get tested," the council said. The health ministry said two individuals and all members of their households were being re-tested and told to self-isolate while further testing and contact tracing was done. England will also add Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Angola to its travel "red list" from 0400 GMT on Sunday, meaning British and Irish residents who arrive in the country must quarantine in a government-approved hotel for 10 days. Non-residents will be refused entry. —Agencies

Biden says other nations must donate more COVID-19 vaccines

NANTUCKET, United States: President Joe Biden said other countries need to match US "generosity" and donate more COVID-19 vaccines, or the pandemic will not be stopped.

"This pandemic will not end until we have global vaccinations," he said in a statement from Nantucket, where he was spending the Thanksgiving holiday.

Biden also called on countries to give up intellectual property protections to allow vaccines to be manufactured worldwide.

The urgent appeal from the US president came as he imposed travel restrictions on eight southern African countries in response to the detection of the potentially dangerous new Omicron variant of COVID-19 in South Africa.

"For the world community, the news about this new variant should make clearer than ever why this pandemic will not end until we have global vaccinations," Biden said.

"The United States has already donated more vaccines to other countries than every other country combined. It



is time for other countries to match America's speed and generosity."

He urged countries taking part in a ministerial level meeting of the World Trade Organization next week to lift intellectual property protections on their coronavirus vaccines, allowing manufacturing to expand rapidly.

"This news today reiterates the importance of moving on this quickly," he said. Our comprehensive coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic and its developments. Download our app or subscribe to our Telegram. —AP

Online conspiracies fuel Dutch virus unrest

THE HAGUE: When COVID-19 riots rocked the Netherlands for the second time in a year, Ricardo Pronk was there to livestream it all to his followers on social media.

The 50-year-old anti-vaccination activist administered a Facebook group with 10,000 followers, which had shared a call for a demonstration in the port city of Rotterdam on Nov 19 that later turned violent. The group, which was recently removed by Facebook, is part of a network of conspiracy theorists and COVID-deniers on social media reaching as far as the Dutch parliament, whose influence has sparked concern among experts.

For Pronk, vaccines "are weapons made to kill". He also embraces the QAnon conspiracy group's narrative about "satanic child abuse" by a "globalised elite".

But the unemployed former computer technician, who had chosen a banner for the group with a lion against a backdrop of flames, rejects any responsibility for the unrest in the Netherlands. Five people were shot when police opened fire in Rotterdam, and riots spread around the country for the next three days. "Violence is not the best way, of course not. The best is to do things peacefully," he told AFP. —AFP

Can small nuclear reactors really help the climate?



NEW YORK: Much of the world has been turning away from nuclear power, with its ageing plants, legacy of meltdowns and radioactive waste. But some governments, big companies and billionaires including Bill Gates and Warren Buffett are convinced the technology can help save the planet.

Unlike wind and solar sources, nuclear power can be switched on and off at any time, and without the planet-warming emissions produced by gas and coal.

Investments of hundreds of millions of dollars are going toward a new generation of so-called small modular reactors (SMRs), which ultimately could provide a safe and nimble source of carbon-free energy - if they can overcome challenges related to economics, safety and public opinion.

Of the more than 70 such reactors that the International Atomic Energy Agency lists as in some stage of design or development, the smallest are less than 5m in diameter and 10m in height. (The plant that would be built to operate the reactor would be bigger, of course.)

SMRs typically have less than 300 megawatts of generating capacity, about a third of that of existing reactors. The "M" in SMR - modular - means these reactors can largely be built in factories and shipped in standardised parts for assembly on-site. That means shorter construction times and greater flexibility to expand to meet demand. Since the Fukushima Dai-ichi meltdowns in Japan in 2011, there has been a dearth of investor interest in building expensive new plants, with China, Russia and India as notable exceptions. —Reuters

Top US diplomat for Asia to visit four ASEAN countries

WASHINGTON: The top US diplomat for East Asia will visit Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand from the weekend after President Joe Biden pledged stepped up engagement with Southeast Asia, a key battleground in his contest for influence with China. Daniel Kritenbrink, the assistant secretary of state for East Asia. —AFP

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